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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - NEWLY-ENERGIZED TFG BUILDS BRIDGES IN  
EFFORT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF AL-SHABAAB WEAKNESS

REF: A. NAIROBI 1698  
[B](#). NAIROBI 1732  
[C](#). NAIROBI 1655  
[D](#). NAIROBI 1735  
[E](#). NAIROBI 1638

Classified By: Ambassador Michael E. Ranneberger; reasons 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#). (C) Summary: The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) appears to be newly energized following President Sharif's August 6 meeting with the Secretary (septel) and months of drift in the wake of an extended al-Shabaab offensive in Mogadishu that began May 7. Recent developments: an apparent drop-off in funding for al-Shabaab, TFG success in bringing at least some of the Abgal into its fold, more productive TFG - Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'a (ASWJ) cooperation, a budding relationship with the Puntland leadership, increased al-Shabaab and Hisbul Islam defections, coupled with gains on regional battlefields could together create conditions for the TFG to dramatically increase its sway in Somalia. Any one or all of these positive developments could easily be reversed, however, which would leave the TFG isolated and vulnerable, much as it was before its patient outreach efforts to ASWJ, the Puntland Administration, the Abgal, and others began to bear fruit. I believe that intensive, well-targeted, real-time USG support for the TFG at this critical potential turning point is necessary if the government of Sheikh Sharif is to capitalize on this rare constellation of positive developments. Our general recommendations follow in para 17. Septel will provide more detailed suggestions on steps we could take. End summary.

[2](#). (C) As reported ref a, an August 6 meeting with the Secretary has energized TFG President Sharif. Since the meeting, he has re-shuffled his Cabinet (ref d), prevailed on his Prime Minister to cement ties with President "Faroole" in Puntland, mended fences with his Abgal co-clan members (ref b), and provided funding to northern Galgaduud ASWJ factions.

[3](#). (C) This burst of activity is in stark contrast to the lack of direction that followed the three months of on-again, off-again battles with al-Shabaab in Mogadishu that began May [7](#). That seesaw fighting often saw ragtag TFG troops in full flight, and only AMISOM standing between them and complete al-Shabaab control of Mogadishu. AMISOM's aggressive intercession on behalf of the TFG during the last major round of fighting appeared to have convinced al-Shabaab that it could not remove the TFG as long as AMISOM remained in Mogadishu. President Sharif has used the comparative lull that followed to build bridges to potential allies and re-configure his government.

Contacts with Puntland  
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14. (C) Although we had pressed the TFG to establish strong ties with the Puntland Authority from the day Sheikh Sharif became President, it had been reluctant to make the necessary overtures. Puntland President "Farooole's" often-stated unhappiness with President Sharif's selection of Sharmarke as Prime Minister, and the lack of consultations with "Farooole" that preceded the appointment of Darod clan members to the expanded Parliament in January were responsible for the TFG - Puntland rift. (Note: Sharmarke and "Farooole" are of the same major clan, and "Farooole" believed he at a minimum should have been consulted before President Sharif made his choice of Prime Minister. The fact that President Sharif had come to power at the expense of his Darod predecessor Abdullahi Yusuf made consultation even more important in "Farooole's" view. End note.)

15. (C) On May 15, our intercession resulted in a TFG Prime Minister Sharmarke and Puntland President "Farooole" dinner in Nairobi. That positive meeting never crystallized cooperation between the TFG and the Puntland Administration, however, and in the intervening months it appeared as if Puntland might be charting a path toward greater autonomy, like Somaliland. Just in advance of the August 7 meeting with the Secretary, and more concentratedly since, President Sharif pressed a reluctant Prime Minister Sharmarke to travel to Puntland. A flurry of telephone calls during the week of August 10 seems to have set the stage for Sharmarke's August 17 departure for Galkayo. (Note: The PM is scheduled to remain in Puntland until August 20. Accompanying him is a virtually all-Harti delegation that includes the Ministers of Land and Air Transport, Industry, Post and

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Telecommunications, Trade, Diaspora, and Constitutional Affairs. End note.) The visit so far has resulted in an invitation for President Sharif to visit Puntland from President "Farooole." The TFG's hope is that contacts will ultimately produce military, security, and other forms of cooperation that will improve its chances against its enemies.

Bringing in the Abgal  
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16. (C) President Sharif's more conservative Islamic credentials and his determination to form a trans-clan government had caused him to ignore his own clan, the Abgal, both in assembling his Cabinet and in courting possible allies for his government. (Note: Sharif until the August 17 re-shuffle (ref d) was the only Abgal in his sprawling, 37-minister Cabinet. End note.) One by-product of Sharif's refusal to work actively with the Abgal was the humiliating loss of Mogadishu Abgal districts to al-Shabaab during fighting that began May 7. The Abgal districts of Medina, Karaan, and Abdi Aziz fell, as local Abgal clan militias refused to defend their turf on behalf of the TFG.

17. (C) At the urging of Ambassador to Kenya Mohammad Ali Nur "Americo," himself an Abgal, Sheikh Sharif has dramatically increased outreach to his clan. Since the beginning of August, he has met key Abgal leaders at Villa Somalia, and on August 7, the President presided at an all-afternoon session with key Mudulood representatives in Nairobi. (Note: The Mudulood comprise the Abgal, Isse, Wadalan, Hilife, and Hawadle sub-clans. End note.) Negotiations with the Abgal have resulted in representatives of two key Abgal sub-clans being brought into the government. Abdirahman Omar Osman "Engineer Yarisow" (Hawiye/Abgal/Wadubhan) has been slotted for a newly-created Ministry of Treasury and Dahir Gelle (Hawiye/Abgal/Waesle) steps in behind Farhan Ali Mohamud (Hawiye/Habr Gedir/Duduble) as Minister of Information.

18. (C) Sheikh Sharif's outreach to the Abgal has quickly borne fruit. We have been told by Abgal/Waesle contacts in south Galgaduud that Waesle elder Sheikh Ahmed recruited a significant number of clan militiamen who pushed al-Shabaab

out of the south Galgaduud town of Galcad on August 11 - 12. The TFG chartered an aircraft to airlift 17 of the most seriously wounded Waesle to a Mogadishu hospital in order to reinforce government engagement. The TFG is now working strenuously to transport ammunition to the Waesle in order to repulse an expected al-Shabaab counterattack. We believe that the ammunition will be airlifted to Galcad at TFG expense on August 20.

#### Reaching Out To Juba

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¶9. (C) Former TFG Minister of Defense "Gandi" in recent weeks has stepped up efforts to implement a TFG-backed Juba offensive, aimed at pushing al-Shabaab out of Kismayo and creating links between an evolving Juba administration and the TFG (ref b). "Gandi" reports that the TFG is in contact with local players in Juba, including Ogaden clan heavyweights Ahmed Madobe and Ibrahim Shukri, in an effort to reconcile differences and obtain their cooperation. "Gandi" said President Sharif and Prime Minister Sharmarke fully support the plan, which remains closely held within the TFG.

¶10. (C) "Gandi's" efforts take place against the backdrop of recent meetings in Juba and Nairobi between supporters of Madobe and Shukri and predominantly-Darod/Kabalah clan leaders and MPs. Their goal is a regional Jubaland administration, linked to the TFG. Our contacts tell us a 27-person Steering Committee has been formed for Jubaland, but arguments remain over who will fill key positions. "Gandi" told us he has full confidence in Shukri's commitment to the TFG but described Madobe as a "complex" but militarily necessary participant. Darod/Kabalah leaders told us the day Madobe captures Kismayo he will have to announce that he is part of and/or supports the TFG or he will lose clan support. Ogaden leaders reportedly believe that Ogaden-led control of Kismayo will translate into greater Ogaden representation in the TFG at the ministerial level and that political negotiations regarding a greater Jubaland to include Gedo should for now remain unaddressed. Although formidable challenges remain for a would-be Jubaland administration, such as whether or not Gedo region should be included, TFG efforts to gain support of key players in Lower Juba and willingness to consider support for the creation of a

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Jubaland state are positive developments. (Note:The TFG Charter and Djibouti process outcomes call for forward movement on decentralization but the TFG had in the past shown little willingness to link to regional administrations. End note.)

#### TFG - ASWJ Cooperation

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¶11. (C) The TFG has stepped gingerly into cooperation with Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'a (ASWJ). Initially, it feared that ASWJ's battlefield successes and political aspirations in the central regions and ASWJ's suspicions of Sheikh Sharif's alleged "wahabiist" leanings meant that ASWJ was determined to supplant the TFG at the center of the Djibouti process. ASWJ, which in initial conversations with USG officials and the TFG was alleging that its victories over al-Shabaab entitled it to the TFG presidency, did little to dispel TFG fears. ASWJ military setbacks and persistent overtures by the TFG produced a June 21 signed TFG - ASWJ agreement which, gradually, has produced real cooperation.

#### Success in Hiraan

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¶12. (C) TFG Minister of National Security "Sanbaloshi" (Hawadle) and other TFG officials since late July have remained in close contact with leaders in Beledweyne and elsewhere in the Hiraan region to ensure that the gains of July 26 were not reversed. They have stepped up cooperation

with Ethiopian-backed ASWJ forces in the region (ref c). (Note: According to President Sharif, the TFG has provided financial support to the tune of \$100,000 to ASWJ-Hiraan. End note.) TFG-aligned forces on July 26 managed to take control of Beledweyne town in Hiraan region. Police General Mukhtar Hussein Afrah (Hawiye/Hawadle) led a successful push into Beledweyne's western half on July 26, where Islamists reportedly had held sway. On August 20, al-Shabaab-initiated fighting for the control of Beletweyne resumed. We believe that with the assistance of nearby ENDF troops, TFG-aligned forces should retain control of the town. As of August 19 TFG-aligned forces from Beledweyne were closing on the town of Bulaburde, where there was reportedly fierce fighting on August 20. Another by-product of increased TFG assertiveness in Hiraan region has been Hisbul Islam (HI) defections. During the weekend of August 14, an estimated 53 armed HI soldiers and three commanders defected to the TFG. There have also been defections in Mogadishu, many of them from al-Shabaab.

#### Advances in Gedo

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¶13. (C) The strategic town of Luq in Gedo region on August 19 fell to pro-TFG forces a few days after the border town of Beled Hawa was taken by joint TFG-ASWJ forces in the region. Our contacts tell us that five TFG MPs as well as Bay, Bakool, and Gedo governors worked together with local Rahanweyn and Marehan clan militia to push Hisbul Islam out of Luq. On August 17 TFG troops from Dolow worked with Rahanweyn and Marehan clan-based ASWJ forces to consolidate control of Beled Hawa. While both Luq and Beled Hawa have since been surrendered to Hisbul Islam, their brief seizure by pro-TFG forces have shown that Hisbul Islam is vulnerable in Gedo.

#### Renewed Engagement With the Media

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¶14. (C) The TFG appears to have redoubled its efforts to engage effectively with the media to promote TFG policy goals. The Foreign Minister reacted quickly and comprehensively to the August 13 killings of five Pakistani nationals in Puntland. On August 16, the newly-launched TFG website covered a press conference at which a TFG spokesman lauded ASWJ's weekend victories in Galgaduud region, a positive step in promoting TFG - ASWJ cooperation. These and other examples mark a noticeably improved media outreach effort by the TFG. Not coincidentally, Post sent two media advisors to Mogadishu from July 23 - August 3 to work with TFG public affairs personnel and institutions. The advisors spent much of the time coaching the TFG's personnel in subjects like identifying priority issues for media attention and coordinating public outreach among TFG entities. TFG officials, to include the President and Prime Minister, were

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very supportive of the assessors and have indicated that they are eager to maintain the momentum resulting from the visit and U.S.-associated continued engagement. In the August 18 Cabinet re-shuffle, President Sharif removed his Minister of Information, who he believed was under-performing.

#### Cabinet Re-shuffle

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¶15. (C) Although far from perfect (septel), a sweeping cabinet re-shuffle (ref d) has re-shuffled ministers who have been either off-message, ineffective, or AWOL during the TFG's tenure. Although some ministers who are equally liable to charges of not actively advancing the TFG's agenda remain in place, the shake-up could put them on notice that they must perform if they are to keep their jobs. Sheikh Sharif's dramatic decision to re-shuffle the deck went against the advice of some who believed that sweeping changes should not

be attempted when the government was under stress, and is further evidence of the President's new determination to make progress.

#### Parliament Shake-Up

¶16. (C) The TFG's determination to purge underperformers has hit the Parliament as well. On July 27, following a speech by Sheikh Sharif, five AWOL MPs were expelled from Parliament and a further forty-nine warned that they must return to Mogadishu and participate in the plenaries or face a similar fate (ref e). Among those expelled in the first tranche were several persistent critics of the TFG. Although the 54 MPs cited are a minority of the estimated 125 MPs who are almost permanently absent, the warnings and expulsions are evidence of the TFG's intention to force MPs to take their responsibilities seriously. (Note: At present, there are 548 deputies in the transitional Parliament. On the day of the July 27 session, 301 of the estimated 350 MPs in Mogadishu attended the plenary. End note.)

#### Recommendations and Comment

¶17. (C) With its recent burst of activity, the TFG is attempting with some success to capitalize on positive developments in the regions. It still faces an uphill struggle, which could be complicated by an announced Hisbul Islam/al-Shabaab Ramadan offensive, but its prospects are significantly better than they were just a few short weeks ago. USG support, if provided rapidly and appropriately calibrated to TFG needs, could greatly enhance the TFG's chances. In order to aid the TFG's efforts to take advantage of this opportunity, I recommend that PKO monies currently available be spent, where possible, for civil affairs efforts that could show the TFG delivering services to Somalis in territories it controls. Where possible, the TFG's Price Waterhouse Cooper mechanism should be used in effecting these transactions. Key TFG ministries should urgently be provided with advisors, preferably from the Somali diaspora, in order to help them rapidly build capacity and discharge their functions. We believe that robust youth employment programs in areas controlled by the TFG would go a long way over the short term in building good will and attracting potential defectors. Rapidly re-starting local administration capacity-building programs is also essential. Micro-lending or micro-grant programs in areas under TFG control could further increase goodwill toward the government and aid local economies. A small grants or self-help-like program could pay outsize dividends in Somalia's impoverished regions. If the TFG succeeds in establishing stable control over the central regions, recognition of the government should be considered. Septel will provide more detailed recommendations for consideration.

RANNEBERGER